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DOI:

[10.1080/13528165.2015.1071033](https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2015.1071033)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

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Citation for published version (APA):

Read, A., -, F., & -, H. (2015). In the Ruins of the University: Institution in Personal and Public History. *PERFORMANCE RESEARCH*, 20(4), 14-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2015.1071033>

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In the Ruins of the University: Institution in Personal and Public History

Alan Read

In memory of Colette King and Bill Readings. Fellow Travellers.

“Goethe: genius [is] posthumous productivity. All institution is in this sense genius.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, 1955

My title is a conflation of two sources that would appear to mark two ends of a cycle between promise and petrification. The first a bowdlerization of Bill Readings', now two decade-old work, *The University in Ruins* published after his untimely deathⁱ The second the title of a course taught by Maurice Merleau-Ponty at the College de France in 1954-1955 shortly before Bill Readings, and I, were born.ⁱⁱ As Rosalyn Diprose summarises it: “In this course Merleau-Ponty is concerned with meaning, its institution and transformation; how sense is “deposited” in me and in social institutions but also how innovation arises.”ⁱⁱⁱ Here institution might be that action that brings about a beginning, but also it describes the state of the thing thus established.^{iv} At the outset of his course Merleau-Ponty puts it like this: “time is the very model of institution: passivity-activity, it continues, because it has been instituted it fuses, it cannot stop being, it is total because it is partial, it is a field.”^v Bill Readings' eloquent work chimes with that accord for a ‘field’, it echoes for me and in me, still, in its insights for the University today: “We have to recognise that the University is a *ruined institution*, while thinking what it means to dwell in those ruins without recourse to romantic nostalgia.”^{vi} There is, as Claude Lefort explained when considering Merleau-Ponty's course, but equally might have been channeling Bill Readings' principle theme: “[...] no call to the future which does not imply a decline of the past.”^{vii}

In the following essay I would like to put this lecture *within* a University, and this book *about* a University, to work to undermine our new, very old University, the ‘School of Placebo’, that Chaucer wrote about in *The Merchant's Tale*. That is a School known well to us today, where sycophancy thrives, where ‘to please’ rather than critically address, the students, the Government, corporate interests, the ‘public’, is the management mantra, and where the original performative force of the Placebo

has long been forgotten. That force within the Roman Catholic ‘Office of the Dead’, was someone who came to a funeral, claiming (often falsely) a connection with the deceased, to try to get a share of any food or drink being served. This usage of Placebo, contrary to Chaucer’s, originated from the phrase “placebo Domino in regione vivorum”, and attracts me for its larceny on behalf of life in the face of the new nihilism. This Placebo marks a mercenary form of trespass against the orthodox institution of mourning and its ‘material’ history that so often flatters to deceive that the observer of events can remain objective simply by evoking the signifier: ‘I am a historical materialist’. My writing should be considered a toast to those maverick pedagogic souls who contested such calumnies with their generativity, their fecundity (*stiftung*) not least of all as exemplified by the spirits of Bill Readings and Colette King, remembered fondly here.

The University as a ‘ruined institution’, currently conditional upon widespread forces of marketization that require no further comment from me now (given I am not an economist and I consider the vague term ‘neo-liberal’ an unhelpful tyranny), does not seem so far from the theatre as an abandoned practice as I have figured it elsewhere.^{viii} I would only here have to identify the sorry UK saga surrounding the exile of Dartington College of Arts from its longstanding rural home in the Dart Valley in Devon, to its new Eco-home in Falmouth, and the subsequent broad hostility to that institution’s ‘rebranding’ of its illustrious and innovative past identified with figures such as Kurt Joos, Michael Chekov, Steve Paxton, to capitalise upon a smorgasbord of apparently ‘abandoned’ principles that many identified with the passing of Dartington’s pedagogic spirit, Colette King, in late 2014.^{ix}

Indeed, tracking this quarter century-long trajectory loss of institutional creative and critical courage, in the UK from around the inception of the research evaluation exercise in the 1980s variously signified with acronyms such as RAE and REF, the University’s ‘reason for being’ is quite different to that of other diminished practices when one considers Readings’ rationale of its *past* raison d’être. Indeed you might say it is precisely a fetishisation of ‘performance’ amongst University managements that has squandered its hard fought Enlightenment gains in the public eye. An irony not lost on those performance departments not considered sufficiently performative to survive by those performing the performance exercise. Our colleagues who judge our colleagues, at Falmouth for instance.

For Readings the University has had three divergent and non-contemporaneous discourses on which it has founded its credibility over three centuries of Post Enlightenment survival: the Kantian concept of ‘Reason’, the Humboldtian idea of ‘Culture’ and the techno-bureaucratic notion of ‘Excellence’. While a useful essay could be written about any, or all three, I will try to offer something more than recapitulation.^x I would like to propose, by way of an argument here, that we have now entered a fourth, especially charged and potentially *terminal* era for the University, that of the phantom of the ‘Public’. I would briefly add, though this essay is not an obituary for the University, things are surely terminal for the ‘campus model’ at least, simply because, should the 21st Century University really seek its Public, I mean *really*, it might find that Public, from Delhi to Lagos, has already registered with another, much more fluid operation, widely known by its acronym, A2K, the *Access to Knowledge* movement, which is a truly international University of the Commons without walls.^{xi}

But back to Europe, and North America, where Readings laid his ground. Here Reason lost its specious authority, Culture lost its nation-status, and Excellence had, by definition and slightly problematically, when we looked more closely at what managers’ were extolling when they extolled its virtue, excellence had *no content*. A reluctant visit to the laughable *Leadership Foundation* in the UK, an angst-ridden conglomerate producing policy documents with bromide titles like *Catalysing Change*, top-slicing resources from University funds to sustain cult like ‘leadership training’ for the universities, is all one needs to realize why there has been a complete rationality by-pass between executive pay and performance in the UK HE ‘Sector’ (as it so elegantly refers to itself).^{xii} Where is Phillip Seymour Hoffman when you need him to play *The Master II*? But now, I would suggest, this upper case *Public* who are effectively paying for such management, that ‘Public’ evoked by performance measures for the calibration of academic research such as ‘impact’ and ‘engagement’, this ‘Public’ who are the inevitable symptom of an increasingly privatised domain, despite the reiteration of their capitalized name, ‘the Public’ has no *form*.

I once knew a commons, a people, a multitude, maybe even a Public. It *had* form for me, at least I think it did. It certainly resisted me for years and I felt its push and pull through the means of performance - performances of all kinds, night and day, in schools, streets, laundrettes, factories, on the river, in homes. Directing this

neighbourhood theatre in the Docklands area of South East London alongside my colleague David Slater, for a decade in the 1980s, working with countless groups and individuals what I called in the book *Theatre & Everyday Life* (1993) a 'Lay Theatre', somehow beyond the constraints of the profession but always cognisant of the way that profession shapes the distribution of theatre's sensibility and its potential publics. Here were the first of the *64 Million Artists* well before they were given a number.^{xiii} A counter-public constituted, largely, here, by *needs*.^{xiv} It was here I first worked with the theatre makers Forster and Heighes, who made images at the time like this.

Image:

And then becoming aware of *other* publics, working on folk traditions and ceremonies of Catalan urbanised rural culture in the 1990s in Barcelona, exploring the relationship between folklore and fakelore, that *twice restored* behaviour of performance, for those *Corre Foc*, Human / Dragon hybrids, who appeared for centuries in the rural domain from within a folk tradition, and then reappeared on the streets of Barcelona from the mid 1960s, recovered and orchestrated by the urbanised Adjuntamente, to resist centralist Fascist influence from Franco's Madrid. Here was a Public constituted by *demands*.

And, for the next four years, directing something in the region of 500 talks at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, with my colleague Helena Reckitt, for a multifarious form of fashionable counter publics, of heterogeneous desires and polymorphous identities, before I sloped off into academic and family life, where I might have expected to be able to forget the Public, but I had timed it wrong.

A Public was insistent, *in mind*, if not quite so apparent in presence. At Roehampton University a five year project in the first half decade of the 21st Century on *Performance, Architecture and Location*, conducted mainly in the neighbouring Alton East and West Estates, estates in which a post war *idea* of the public was invented and subsequently betrayed, in which the possibility of rethinking what a 'Civic Centre' might be resisted the inevitable marginalisation of the radical particularities that performance people might prefer to the possibility of becoming more generally accessible, universally available, to a disenfranchised Public even?^{xv}

Image: *Middle English*, Forster & Heighes (2003)

And latterly at King's College London, dwelling in its privatised ruins, working with others in hard hats, with cost ledgers, with planning constraints, to resist *that* University's institutional amnesia, to defend against the dementia of disciplines that forget their recent separation in Modernity from multiple publics, a separation that happens to coincide with the commodification of the University described above. A temporary separation, not a divorce. I like to think we have never *been* Modern in performance, paraphrasing Bruno Latour, we have never recognised such silos and schisms, for we were first baked at the moment in the 1960s when Roland Barthes described inter-disciplinarity as the 'cream puff of the new university'.

Image: *Somerset House*, Forster & Heighes, 2010

So, some hardening up on a Public, if not *the* Public, might be in order from the very discipline that has long harboured a special desire *for* a Public. I took this on fore-square over 300 pages of *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* (2008) insisting intemperately that the political presumptions of performance were wildly overrated and that some slower, more careful thinking, of theatre's social relations was in order to avoid, what Slavoj Žižek has called: the threat of 'pseudo action', which would presumably have a phantom public as its favoured subject.

I am not alone, and never have been, my interests and practices are others', that's for sure. *Performance Studies international* in Toronto in 2010 dedicated itself to the theme of publics, and a couple of years ago I was with Una Bauer, Theron Schmidt, Nick Ridout and others in Zagreb exploring these questions in the light of the writings of Michal Warner, Judith Butler and many others, on publics and counter publics. So the public is everywhere, but still, *happily*, not quite within reach. And Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us why, from the very classroom we might wish to consider as a site worth protecting, if not promoting, in an exploration of institutional spirit.

Having been appointed to the Chair in Philosophy at the College de France in 1952 Maurice Merleau-Ponty inherited a full teaching load, with two courses per semester on Mondays and Thursdays covering areas such as literary language, expression and the philosophy of history.^{xvi} One can only guess at the feedback forms for the 'national student survey' given they did not exist, the College de France confident as an institution that its Professors would be 'fed back to' in the form of intellectual dialogue. The Monday session was a warm up Reading Group, but the Thursdays

were when Merleau-Ponty set about his ‘theory of truth and inter-subjectivity’ that he had pitched at his candidacy for the tenured position.^{xvii}

The work Merleau-Ponty advertised at his interview was a continuation of his enquiry into Edmund Husserl’s later texts, including ‘The Origin of Geometry’. Reassuringly for those academic interviewees today who in all good faith promise ‘forthcoming’ works at interview that somehow never materialize due to early teaching career administrative overload, Merleau-Ponty spoke at length about two books that did not exist, and were never to see the light of day.^{xviii} Robert Vallier, Merleau-Ponty’s translator in his Course Notes on *Nature*, puts Merleau-Ponty’s Husserlian project like this: “In these texts, [those being considered by Merleau-Ponty] Husserl is concerned as always with how certain idealities emerge and constitute an ideal history of the truth, with how a historical tradition is instituted (*gestift*), sedimenting as an ideal cultural object, always available for reactivation (*Nachstiftung*), which opens us to a possible future. This “fecundity of tradition” guarantees that new expression will always be possible.”^{xix}

In preparing for what was to become his ‘famous’ course on Nature, in the following academic year, (if a lecture series could ever be deemed noteworthy, that is) Merleau-Ponty was proposing that ‘tradition’ formed a ‘historical unconsciousness’ to which we are, as Vallier glosses it, ‘condemned’, while ‘Nature’ is what is there before any such ‘institution of tradition’, as an ‘absolute past’, an ‘*Ur-Stiftung*’, an ‘originary institution’.^{xx} Here is how Merleau-Ponty summarised it himself on the first Thursday of the second semester. Rather than hand out a Module outline and have students parrot its contents to cover the first class, he begins this way (in French):

“Nature is the primordial – that is, the nonreconstructed, the noninstituted; hence the idea of an eternity of nature (the eternal return), of a solidity. Nature is an enigmatic object, an object that is not an object at all; it is not really set out in front of us. It is our soil [sol] – not what is in front of us, facing us, but rather, that which carries us.”^{xxi}

Not a bad start to term. Nature is thus the non-instituted, while its other, the *instituted* ghosts the pages of his later notes throughout the course on Nature. This anachronistic and teasingly unchronological ‘pre-Nature’ work on instituting, was in the first semester framed under the title: ‘Institution in Public and Private Life’ (that has given

me my sub title), and in the second semester was titled: ‘The Problem of Passivity: Sleep, the Unconscious, Memory’.^{xxii} But for now let us stay awake to the demands of that first semester’s teaching.

For Merleau-Ponty institution “[...] means establishment in an experience (or in a constructed apparatus) of dimensions [...] in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense and will make a sequel, a history.”^{xxiii} There is a clear equation that Merleau-Ponty deploys to describe institution: it is not only “what has been fixed by means of contracts, but that *plus functioning*.”^{xxiv} [My italics.] This ‘dynamic of the system’ operates whether it is ‘official or not’ and it is in the latent content of this operating that Merleau-Ponty suggests we find what is ‘most important’, the reason for the *Stiftung*. Institution is not in any sense an opposite to revolution, but the continuation of it by other means. There is no separation between private institution and public institution as the person themselves must be understood as institution, in and from birth. “The idea of institution is precisely the foundation of a personal history on the basis of contingency.”^{xxv}

If that is what Merleau-Ponty was teaching each Thursday in the classroom, what have his students been making of this since? Let us turn to a doctoral student of Merleau-Ponty, namely Donald Jack Beith, whose PhD examines ‘passivity’ within the work of the philosopher, and in so doing has inevitably to encounter its other, institution.^{xxvi} “Institution precisely names a process that generates sense without yet constituting it in a wholly active manner. Merleau-Ponty conceives institution as a temporally protracted development in which events are resumed, taken up, by the perceiver, in such a way as to endow experience with durable dimensions.”^{xxvii} And Beith continues: “[...] institution names the developmental movement in which differences sediment into qualitative levels or dimensions of existence in organic bodies. These instituted differences give rise to novel and irreducible modes of life. Thus, even though the philosophy of institution roots human sense-making in the generative passivity of nature, it also requires a study of the definitive temporality that is instituted in and by each life”.^{xxviii}

This reading of ‘institution’, perhaps not coincidentally, combines two of the preeminent interests of performance processes of the last three decades: those of animal life and site-sensitive work. Another scholar of Merleau-Ponty’s lectures,

Rosalyn Diprose notes, as Beith points out, that a “philosophy of institution extends an account of sedimentation to include exposure to a future that is more than the past alone enables”^{xxxix} Here the ‘Ruins’ that Bill Readings infers are the sedimentary traces of a University, from which a future might be expected to emerge, are categorically not just the sentimental shambles of nostalgia, nor the material for melancholia and mourning, but the foundations for the true spirit of ‘research’, that is of course in its original and true sense, *adventure*. Diprose shares this reading of Merleau-Ponty’s generative conception of institution when she says: “[...] sedimentation is not just meaning surviving as a residue in an activity that repeats the past or that duplicates a social convention. ‘Institution’ also involves beginning something new, initiating, innovation. Every experience involves a simultaneous de-centering and recentering of the elements in our personal life, a movement by us toward the past and of the reanimated past toward us.”^{xxx}

So with Merleau-Ponty’s geological conception of institution as developed within a classroom in mind, here’s the substance, or whatever substance I can recover from the ruins of the University which I know best, from the classroom where I happen to be. Within the second part of this essay I would like to ask quite how an understanding of *performance*, an apparatus that calibrates shifting degrees of community, a commitment *to* others, and immunity a distinction and separation *from* others, might interrupt the phantasmic discourse of ‘the Public’ I have been experiencing all these years, tactically and critically. How might the institution of a public provide a means through which the innovation required of an institution that institutes something be mobilised through performance?

I will try to take Bill Readings’ example literally and explore how we might examine something that Bill Readings describes as: the “tactical use of the space of the University, while recognising that space as an historical anachronism.”^{xxxi} Such a *tactical* project, recognises the *critical* nature of accountability to those with little, or *no* access to knowledge, while resisting any accounting for a Public who remain, happily, beyond our best efforts.

Let’s up the stakes by making tactical use, in other words, *reuse*, of the strategic use of the ‘people’. How might we redeploy the energies of such a public, theatrical or otherwise, back towards a project which Bill Readings would suggest is the one

purpose left for the University, perhaps the *only* one following the loss of Reason, Culture and Excellence. That purpose is defined by Readings as a process of *re-meaning* for an institutional system.

While the University of this century has, indeed as Readings suggested, put ‘Thought’ under threat, it has, over the last decade done the opposite of what he said it would do: to *dereferentialise* its means of achieving this. Where *his* prognosis indicated a *decline* in the ideological function of the University, if he was around now, and he isn’t, he would notice *an increase in ideological* function through the accelerated *referentiality* of the Research Excellence Framework in the UK, at whose human beating heart, one might find if one opened up that bounteous chest, a Public waiting to be tested for the *impact* it has felt from our research.

This is what the University in an age of Nation states used to do, for Readings at least:

“Within modernity, the University held a central place in the formation of subjects for the nation-state, along with the production of the ideology that handled the issue of their belonging to that nation state, or culture. Its internal organisation as a community was meant to reflect that structure of belonging to community in which a general culture of conversation held together diverse specialities in a unity that was either organic, societal or transactional.”^{xxxii}

But post nation state, in a globalized, trans-national corporate world, the University is no longer central to the question of a common life. The clue for Readings is that word *conversation*. His, and in performance I could say, *our*, preference for dissensus over consensus is paramount as it guarantees the process cannot be institutionalised, or at least resists easy institutionalization, at the same time as dissensus operates to increase the efficacy of the instituting process. What I do know is there can be no further use of the Public *as alibi*, now that Public has been hunted down by REF panels and asked for its opinion as to our degree of referentiality. Don’t misunderstand me, I would argue here that institutional practices, *cannot be there own reward*. I certainly do not, and clearly from how I have spent my life, *never* thought, that the University is *unaccountable*, pursuing knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Having grown up in a working class family in Essex with a widowed mother for whom knowledge was not a hereditary right but a daily battle of wits, that would be unlikely.

I am also, I hope, not naive. I take it the freedom to spend my life contesting performance, making performance, enjoying the cream puff of inter-disciplinarity, must have been secured at a heavy cost. And that cost is of course the utter irrelevance of what I do to anyone other than a very modest constituency, a vast reduction over a century of the social significance of agency within a University and our expectations of our relevance *outside* the University. Universities have bought these freedoms at a price, a cost that is in direct reciprocal proportion to their Public relevance. And that is where we join Readings in his aspiration to *dwell in the ruins* without recourse to romantic nostalgia, by which I think he means nostalgic ‘heritage projects’, such as the Globe on London’s south bank and its various worldwide progeny of shining reified irrelevance.

Of course the Romantic sensibility has always valued ruins *as ruins* and in this narrative it is precisely ‘Art’ that is expected to play the soothsayer and redeem a fractured life. Sigmund Freud kept images of Roman ruins in sight in Vienna, at Bergasse 19, and latterly London, at Maresfield Gardens, where you can still see them, to remind himself that in the Unconscious, as in ruins, two buildings from heterogeneous historical periods are impossibly co-present. The past is not erased but *haunts* the present. The threat of the repressed memory is a constant threat, and one that reminds us that any inhabitation of the ruins we might like to take up in this essay, or indeed in life, will, inevitably, unleash such remainders.

Unleashing such energies, negative or otherwise, from defaced things is surely performance’s appropriate role, which is why I have assumed as a Professor of Theatre at King’s College London, that it was my role. This is not a role that sits comfortably with the first ‘please at all costs’ meaning of Placebo as cited at the outset, from Chaucer. Rather that second valence of Placebo, to jump the ceremony, the institution, and make good with the spoils, is what we I believe we are charged to do. And it is what the theatre makers Forster and Heighes did when they surfaced the long history of the East Wing of Somerset House in London, recently purchased by King’s College, as the first ‘purpose built’ Public Offices in the UK and perhaps even Europe, where taxation to sustain warfare was first localised, where the Public record office attempted to name and catalogue a Public for the purposes of their better administration, where the Probate Office provided, literally, what is said on the door, an office for probate, probate being the will, the will of the people, the public

presumably, but what of that will? Where has that will gone now we have occupied these spaces? The Performance Foundation which whose first home was that very set of offices, set that question as its first task if only to ward off that return of the repressed that all recovered ruins threaten.

Image: *Plant Science*, Forster & Heighes, 2013.

So let's treat the University for what it is, as I am trying to do here, *as an institution*. In the spirit of the research that Liz Austin has been working on at Roehampton University, taking that institutional history seriously and its future as an 'instituting apparatus' sceptically.^{xxxiii} I would only add here that we might simultaneously want to ask after Merleau-Ponty what it is that is being 'instituted' by this institution, performatively that is. We are not looking on from the suburbs at these ruins, *they are ours*.

Image: *The Red Thing*, 22 Kingsway, Forster & Heighes, 2014-2015

And, in this endeavor where might we begin? Perhaps with that thing most essential to a University, that Merleau-Ponty might have presumed was the *raison d'être* for his Thursday classes, yet peculiarly absent from almost all managerial 'Future Plans' for the University today. Amongst these University shaped ruins, Bill Readings reminds us, 'Thought' belongs to an economy of *waste*, ruins proper, not to a restricted economy of calculation, the Research Excellence Framework and the refaced ruin. Thought is non-productive labour, as Readings describes it, and hence does not show up on balance sheets except as *waste*. Thought is precisely that which remains unclassifiable and therefore of negligible interest to those for whom the balance sheet is all. But be warned, in restoring 'Thought' to our vocabulary of the institution, the point is not to create a restored University as a ghost town, a 'Sanctuary to Thought'. I have little patience for University Departments who bleat their way through the threatened austerity driven economic cuts process while forgetting to come to the Union protests, to witness student support of our actions.

Image: *The Red Thing* 22 Kingsway, Forster & Heighes, 2015.

"To dwell in the ruins of the university" is therefore for Bill Readings, "to try to do what we can, while leaving space for what we cannot envisage to emerge".^{xxxiv} I took this call very much to heart with the creation of a landscape of performance spaces on

the Strand, in central London, for King's College, the *Anatomy Theatre & Museum*, the *Inigo Rooms*, and to come the *G3* (the reclaimed George III Museum) the *Lucas Theatre*, and in the Virginia Woolf Building, at 22 Kingsway nearby, a rough space for adventure called: *Orlando: Somewhere Between Sardinia and Portugal*, where a certain rhythm of disciplinary attachment and detachment might operate through a simple invitation: to imagine what kinds of performance they are made possible by, and in turn they make possible? This of course is only possible, as Bill Readings did not hesitate to emphasise, if we defend a core curriculum, protected from market conditions, from which our students can make an informed choice about such matters. Here disciplinarity becomes a permanent and founding question, which is why I insist on the *Performance Foundation*, for performance describes for me a dissenting discipline not an anti-discipline as some of my colleagues would have it.

None of this is an alibi from copping out, the referentialising of the University of the 21st century with the return and invasion of the Public to its concerns and commitments is precisely an opportunity for those of us who chose performance because it, somewhere, implied there was something other than an ego lit on a stage unable to see their audience, but a cognisance that *especially* in the theatre, some people might have gathered for whom their desire to gain *immunity* from whatever is going down on the stage might be as relevant as their desire to aspire to some sort of *community* among a temporary public in an auditorium.

It is patently obvious that a University can no longer fulfill a role it might once, but certainly no longer, plays, as some kind of ideal community in a socialised disinterested pursuit of the Idea. Bill Readings was only too aware of that. I work in a friendly and supportive English Department, but, despite the wonderful presence there of DJ and Beyonce specialist Madison Moore, and the *Modern Moves* research initiative, I don't spend nearly as much time dancing there as I do elsewhere, and that strikes me as being peculiar given a University might be well suited to a community of interest such as dancing. The problem is of course, or the freedom, perhaps, that unlike in Inigo Jones' time, community does not come because of obligations of subjects to a monarch or a land. Community is the outcome of the autonomous decisions of individuals to communicate with each other as subjects of the state. This universalising tendency based on a shared human capacity for communication is precisely what performance study reveals as a *chimera* wholly dependent on the

contradiction that we are in some kind of ideal speech situation in which we mean what we say. For Bill Readings, at least, the University has built itself on such a role within this state, *to pretend to be the institution that is not an institution* but simply the structure you get if transparent communication is possible.

Image: *The Red Thing 22 Kingsway*, Forster & Heighes, 2014-2015.

Here performance enters the scene again to expose the fact that there are no pure instances of communication, there are *rhetorics* to each and all forms of communication, and that such communication when it comes to the University and its practices is closer to brute domination than reason, justice and fairness for those outside its immediate closed system. It is not a question of a better truth being protected, to be set free, as some left wing colleagues would believe in the University, but rather a revelation that does justice to the secret, the *public secret* that is, that the University is currently ill-equipped to account for the continuous failure of the representing of a Public, of *any* public.

Rather than presume the community to be the ‘condition’ of the University one might think with Bill Readings of community *without identity*, and again it is here from Jean Luc Nancy’s ‘Inoperative Community’, via Agamben’s ‘Whatever Community’, to Al Lingis’s ‘Community of those who have nothing in common’, that performance with its demanding interest in the complexity of audience, a public even, might offer. We (that is those of us reading and responding to this writing in this Journal) may have nothing in common, but we are *aggregated* together by the ‘state of things’. Our obligation as a community of sorts is to the current, pressing, *condition* of such things, and it would be a community wholly lacking in consensus as to its limits. In my work Claire MacDonald the congregationalist and creative ally has described this as *radical inclusion*, we are obligated to those beyond us precisely because we can’t quite say why, and in that group I would include a public? That public can neither become an *alibi* for the University remaining as it is, nor can it become a compensation to free the University from its social bond.

Image: ‘Flipper’, from *The Red Thing 22 Kingsway*, Forster & Heighes, 2014-2015.

I am not being religious here, though this commitment to some sort of unpayable debt might sound like it. I have shown in *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* (2008) exactly

how such debts are played out with animals, children, props, landscapes, buildings as well as those human others who we fetishise through performance and live arts for their differences of class, race and gender. But we are of course not alone because by definition at least some of us are *with students*. And if we are not now, we might recall once when we were. When we were students together, or students of some schoolteacher, college professor or life-guide from whom we learnt something we could not pretend we already knew despite our best efforts. I would have thought *that* was the foundation of any University, and those students present to us the pedagogic possibility that compels a continuous obligation to the existence and complications of otherness and the recognition of the delicious diversities of difference. And it perhaps should not be forgotten, students, or pupils as Walter Benjamin liked to call them, are people and publics too.

This model is one that I have argued elsewhere, in *Theatre & Everyday Life* (1993) is one that is to be recognised as one of a two-way *dependency* rather than autonomy and emancipation. We are after all, faculty and students alike, *dependent rational animals* as Alistair McIntyre called humans, and as Shannon Jackson has made clear in her book *Social Works* (2012), it is *support* that characterises us, and necessarily reciprocates this dependency. This is not the immaturity of the human, it is our defining quality and it is one that performance study dedicates itself to observing, understanding, and articulating as best it can, while of course performance itself just carries on *doing it* better than anything short of love.

I have said quite enough about the University for the moment, and would, in the spirit of my work at large, want to move further afield to close. But before I go, I would like to acknowledge a passing member of the *public* who started me thinking about these things in the first instance.

Image: Feminism Deconstruction (ICA Programme, 1994)

Feminism, Deconstruction, was the title of one of those many public talks that Helena Reckitt and I worked on together at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in the 1990s. A place and a time where ‘instituting’ was made easy by the presence of Lois Keidan, Catherine Ugwu, Simon Field, Emma Dexter, Kate Bush, Jane Pearce, Mik Flood and Katy Sender. Ceal Floyer collected tickets.^{xxxv} Joshua Oppenheimer was our first volunteer ‘assistant’ in the office.^{xxxvi} It comes to mind in the context of this chapter

not for a public, but for a person, a very private individual, who might wish should they have been able to read this, have remained anonymous.

Diane Elam had been talking about her new book as part of the ICA programme of talks, with Joanna Hodge, who was scheduled to appear, and Jane Moore who replaced Alison Assiter, for a reason I no longer recall. It was October 21st 1994 and I was relatively new at the ICA and still had a budget to work with at the bar. After the event, from amongst the crowd, dare I say the public, given how diffuse were the attendees at this venue, we were joined by a quiet, critical presence whose work I had not read, but who captivated me over that late evening with his prognosis for the crisis in the University. I knew nothing *about* the University, never having worked in one in two decades of theatre involvement, but he made me feel like it might be worth it, it might be worth taking a look. And he took the trouble to encourage me to think of the University as a 'coming community'. I asked him to come back the next day, when we (or more specifically I) were more sober, to discuss how we might progress an event that could respond to his invocation of 'dwelling in the University's ruins'. I wanted to introduce him to Midas Dekkers, the brilliant author of *Dearest Pet* a book on bestiality, and the *Way of All Flesh: The Romance of Ruins*, and other 'ruinous' souls who hung around the ICA bar in those days. But he could not stay, because he had a flight to catch early the next morning. He smiled and said: "next time".

I was later to discover this person was Bill Readings, the author of *The University in Ruins* - a book that was published posthumously. As Diane Elam says in the Foreword to that work: "Bill Readings was in the process of making final revisions to this book when he died in the crash of American Eagle flight 4184 on October 31, 1994."^{xxxvii}

Any work which I do, in respect of the University now, whether it be written or wrought, academic or architectural, I consider a form of marginalia to the work of someone whose writing I deeply respect. Such an acknowledgement can barely begin to do justice to the fluency of that work, the point might here rather be to continue to occupy that tactical space in the University identified by Readings, and occupied by Colette King, by sharpening ones critical resources at every turn. I have had another go at that here.

ⁱ I also took this seminal work as the starting point for the final chapter of *Theatre in the Expanded Field: Seven Approaches to Performance*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), with somewhat different outcomes. I am grateful to Gigi Argyropoulou for her encouragement to return to Bill Readings in this new context.

ⁱⁱ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'L'institution dans l'histoire personnelle et publique' published as: *Institution and Passivity. Course Notes from the College de France (1954-1955)*. Text established by Dominique Darmaillacq, Clude Lefort, and Stephanie Menase. Trans. Leonrad Lawlor and Heath Massey. Vanston: Northwestern University Press, Illinois, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Rosalyn Diprose, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*: ISSN 1538 – 1617, College of Arts and Letters at: <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24532-institution-and-passivity-course-notes-from-the-coll-232-ge-de-france-1954-1955/>, Accessed 19th February 2015.

^{iv} See Claude Lefort, 'Foreword', *Institution and Passivity*, op cit. p. x.

^v See Merleau- Ponty, op cit. p. 7, also Claude Lefort, *Institution and Passivity*. 'Foreword', op cit. p. ix.

^{vi} See Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

^{vii} Claude Lefort op cit. p. xi.

^{viii} See *Theatre in the Expanded Field*, op cit. p. xxx.

^{ix} See William Gaskill, 'Colette King, Obituary', *The Guardian*, December 1st, 2014. On the day I was writing this, February 19th 2015, my Facebook account alerted me to the closure of the *Devising Theatre* degree at Falmouth University, which was described as tracing back to the 'innovations at Dartington of the 1970s'. I would take those innovations to be the labour of, amongst others, Colette King.

^x Readings, op cit. 'Chapter 1', pp. 1-20. Here Readings lays out the three key terms of his work.

^{xi} See *Access to Knowledge*, eds. Gaelle Krikorian and Amy Kapczynski, New York: Zone Books, 2010. The first time I heard the phrase 'University Without Walls', though I think the term College was modestly used, was while travelling with Colette King to Amersfoort, to one of her inspiring peripatetic meetings as part of the development of the Council of Europe Workshop on Theatre and Communities (1983). See *Theatre Papers*, ed. Peter Hulton, Dartington College of Arts, Volume 5, no. 10, now archived at: <http://www.arts-archives.org>, Accessed: 23rd February 2015.

^{xii} Click here at your own risk: <http://www.lfhe.ac.uk>

^{xiii} See *64 Million Artists*, Jo Hunter et al, Battersea Arts Centre, BBC et al, 2014-2015.

^{xiv} See 'Lay Theatre', in Alan Read, *Theatre & Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993/1995.

^{xv} See 'On Civility', *Performance Research*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2004.

^{xvi} All Professors at the College were expected to teach two courses per semester according to Claude Lefort. *Institution and Passivity*, op cit. p. ix.

^{xvii} See 'Translator's Introduction', in Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Nature. Course Notes from the College de France*. Compiled and with notes by Dominique Seglard. Trans. Robert Vallier. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003, p. xv. Available here:

https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=pmJeT0c2oQUC&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=Merleau+Ponty+Institution+and+Passivity&ots=hbXyXzmoFs&sig=AN_GcPDGAsEhWQjJSJrHgpU6fZU#v=onepage&q=Merleau%20Ponty%20Institution%20and%20Passivity&f=false

^{xviii} The titles for these were: *The Origin of Truth* and *The Prose of the World*. See Claude Lefort, 'Foreword' op cit. p. xvi.

^{xix} *Nature*. op cit.. p.xvi

^{xx} *ibid.* p. xvi-xvii

^{xxi} Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity*, *ibid.* p. 4.

^{xxii} I will return, editor willing, to this second semester course in due course in the pages of *Performance Research* in Vol xxx Number xxx 'On Sleep' ed. Ric Allsopp.

^{xxiii} *Institution and Passivity*, *ibid.* pp. 8-9.

^{xxiv} *ibid.* p. 12.

^{xxv} *ibid.* p. 36.

^{xxvi} See Donald Jack Beith, PhD, Department of Philosophy, McGill University, 2012, *Passivity in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*.

http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1424351789401~246 Accessed February 19th 2015

^{xxvii} *ibid.* p. 206.

^{xxviii} *ibid.* p. 212.

^{xxix} *ibid.* 217.

^{xxx} Rosalyn Diprose. 2009. "Toward an Ethico-Politics of the Post-Human: Foucault and Merleau-Ponty." *Parrhesia* (8). 7-19, p.11. Cited in Beith, op cit.

^{xxxi} See Bill Readings, op cit. p168.

^{xxxii} See Bill Readings, op cit. p. 167.

^{xxxiii} See Liz Austin's forthcoming work on institutional histories, structures and politics.

^{xxxiv} Bill Readings, op cit. pp180-193.

^{xxxv} Ceal Floyer now shows at the Lisson Gallery.

^{xxxvi} Joshua Oppenheimer now makes Oscar-nominated documentaries such as *The Act of Killing* (2013).

^{xxxvii} See 'Foreword', Diane Elam (1995) in Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.